

WATER/WASTEWATER FACILITIES COMMISSION  
COMMISSION MINUTES  
September 10, 2014

A meeting of the City of Fitchburg Water / Wastewater Commission was held on September 10, 2014 at the JA Provincial Building, 1200 Rindge Rd, Fitchburg, MA.

The meeting commenced at 4:35 p.m.

Members present:       Lenny Laakso, Commissioner DPW  
                              Rick Healey  
                              George Siener  
                              Michael McLaughlin  
                              Ron Lubianez  
                              Carol Brown

Members Absent:

Others present:        Denis Meunier, Deputy Commissioner Water  
                              Jeff Murawski, Deputy Commissioner Wastewater  
                              Mary Jane Franklin

**ITEM # 1: Approval of last meetings minutes:**

The minutes for the June 11, 2014 meeting were approved by unanimous vote.

**ITEM # 2: Public Forum:**

No forum comments were received.

**ITEM # 3: Discussion on Water Revenue and Rate Study:**

Mr. Meunier presented a summary of revenues vs expenses in the Enterprise Fund since 2011, which showed a deficit in 2013, 2014 and (projected) 2015. Any revenue deficit must be made up by allocating funds from the Water Enterprise Fund reserves. Mr. Meunier suggested the need to explore a rate increase and additional revenue sources.

Mr. Meunier reminded the Commission that many of the 180 miles of water mains in Fitchburg are approaching 100 years old and the need to replace these. He is recommending, at minimum, replacing 2 miles per year with a cost of approximately \$1M per mile and that this is being done currently in conjunction with the sewer separation project. However the current budget as constructed does not support the improvements long term.

The life expectancy of water and sewer mains was discussed, which is generally 50 years. Mr. Meunier suggested having a discussion on conducting a combined rate study for both the Water and Wastewater Departments. Mr. Murawski explained that although there is approximately \$7M in the Wastewater Enterprise Fund reserves, it is expected to be expended within approximately 3 years as the Consent Decree loans are repaid.

Mr. Laakso suggested a multi-utility coordinated effort to improve Fitchburg's infrastructure.

Mr. Meunier has scheduled a meeting with Tighe and Bond, an engineering firm, to discuss the feasibility and cost of having a rate study prepared. It was agreed that the scope of the study should focus on the amount of money needed to sustain and maintain the infrastructure.

**ITEM # 4: Updates on Consent Decree projects:**

Mr. Murawski reported that two wet weather events resulted in sanitary sewer backups into cellars in the Boutelle St. area. The backups were directly related to the sewer separation work in this area. As a result he issued a stop work order to the contractor and immediately make corrections to remedy the situation. Since corrections were made, and although there have been several wet weather events, there have been no further sanitary sewer service backups.

He explained that approximately 50% of the contract days of the job are complete with 45% of the contract fees remaining. He believes Fitchburg is on target to meet the consent decree milestones for completion of the 4D project. The John Fitch Highway sanitary sewer replacement, is also included in the present construction contract but does not have a Consent Decree time line associated with it.

Mr. Murawski informed the Commission that the secondary system upgrade, per the Purchasing Office cannot be constructed under Chapter 30 (General Provisions Relative to State Departments, Commissions, Officers and Employees), Section 39M (Contracts for Construction and Materials; Manner of Awarding) which generally encompasses “horizontal” construction projects. Instead it is considered a “building” construction, or “vertical” construction project. MGL Chapter 149 (Labor & Industries), Sections 44A-44M, which governs contracts for the construction, reconstruction, installation, demolition, maintenance or repair of a building, which will require an Owners Project Manager, and as a result will delay the project.

Mr. Murawski discussed the decree mandated supplemental environmental conservation project that involved repairing a section of eroding brook bank at Falulah Brook at Coolidge Park. He explained that this would offset penalties associated with the Consent Decree. Historically rip rap has been installed to repair erosion along other banks. The Conservation Commission has requested other methodologies be reviewed and have approved an alternate concept. Tighe and Bond believes that additional permitting could be required.

Mr. Murawski reported that an executed contract for a new camera van has been issued. The camera van will be used to inspect and rate the condition of all the pipes in the collection system. Delivery is expected in November. Also, an on call construction services contractor has been approved.

**ITEM # 5: Consideration of revisions to Paper Mill billing methods:**

Mr. Murawski is exploring the possibility of modifying the method that the remaining paper mills are charged for sewer service. Mr. Murawski explained that the current method of billing the two remaining paper mills for sewer service is based on a complicated formula from contracts executed in 1975 for a terms of 30 years for two mills and 40 years for another mill. While some additional research may be needed into the terms of the original contracts, Mr. Murawski would like to engage the mills in further discussion about this issue and come to an agreement on how we move forward in the future.

**ITEM # 11: Other Business:**

Mr. Meunier supplied the commission with a summary of land purchases and the money that has been spent from the reserve account for land purchases. The reserve account of approximately \$490,000 was acquired from the sale of land to Fish and Wildlife. Since 2009, 465.4 acres have been acquired, after

grant payments and other donations, at a net cost of approximately \$136,000. The appraised value for this land is \$1.615M.

The next meeting is scheduled for October 8, 2014 at 4:30 pm at the JA Provincial Building, 1200 Rindge Rd,